

# CONSUMER RESPONSES TOWARD SEXUAL AND NONSEXUAL APPEALS

## The Influence of Involvement, Need for Cognition (NFC), and Gender

Sanjay Putrevu

**ABSTRACT:** This research examines the influence of involvement, need for cognition (NFC), and gender on consumer response toward sexual and nonsexual appeals. The results show that sexual appeals lead to better memory and superior attitudes and purchase intent among low-involvement consumers, whereas high-involvement consumers process both sexual and nonsexual ads more thoroughly and exhibit superior attitudes and purchase intent toward nonsexual appeals. Similarly, low-NFC consumers favor sexual appeals, whereas high-NFC consumers favor nonsexual appeals. With respect to gender, women respond favorably to sexual appeals when there is a strong fit between the ad and brand, but not when the fit is weak. In contrast, men respond favorably to sexual appeals irrespective of the level of fit.

In an increasingly cluttered media environment, advertisers seek ways to break through the clutter and draw attention to their messages. Creative ad execution strategies to engage audience attention include sex, novelty, humor, contrast, fear, music, animation, and celebrity endorsers. While all of these have been used frequently, none has garnered as much controversy as sexual appeals. Sexual appeals have had a long history in advertising, and seem to be even more popular today than in the past (Lin 1998; Reichert and Carpenter 2004). Indeed, this is a phenomenon that is seen in print and broadcast media (Reichert 2003; Rouner, Slater, and Domenech-Rodriguez 2003) and in Western and Eastern cultures alike (Fetto 2001; Tai 1999).

Sexual appeals are generally defined in terms of nudity or sexual explicitness (LaTour and Henthorne 1993; Reichert 2003). Nudity refers to the amount and style of clothing worn by the models in the ads. It is operationalized with models (usually female) wearing progressively less clothing, from demure to suggestive to partially revealing to nude. Sexual explicitness refers to the sexually provocative language and actions of models. Hence, while sexual appeals come in a variety of forms, the general theme includes explicit verbal (e.g., sexual innuendo) and, more important, visual (e.g., partial nudity, suggestive posture) elements of a sexual nature.

Advertisers seem to rely on the adage "Sex Sells." However, a recent practitioner paper reports that twice as many consumers were likely to buy a product that is advertised using the imagery of love as opposed to sex (Fetto 2001). Academic researchers also report mixed results with respect to the effectiveness of sexual appeals. One potential explanation for such findings

is that the effectiveness of sexual appeals varies by personal, product, and situational factors. Thus, this research examines consumer response toward sexual and nonsexual appeals under conditions of low versus high involvement, low versus high need for cognition (NFC), and men versus women.

### LITERATURE

There is a considerable body of academic research on sexual appeals. Several studies show that sexual appeals increase attention and make the message stand out in a cluttered media environment (Dudley 1999; Reichert, Heckler, and Jackson 2001), but that they are considered to be somewhat unethical and offensive (LaTour and Henthorne 1994; Tai 1999). Along the other dimensions of ad effectiveness, however, the results are less consistent. Early studies report that sexual content reduces consumer recall and recognition (Alexander and Judd 1978; Chestnut, LaChance, and Lubitz 1977; Richmond and Hartman 1982), but more recent research shows that such appeals can improve ad recognition (Jones, Stanaland, and Gelb 1998). Some find that when the sexuality is related to the product or cause, favorable brand attitudes and corporate image emerge, whereas no benefit accrues when such a relationship is lacking (Pope, Voges, and Brown 2004). In contrast, others report that despite being considered offensive and unjust, sexual appeals lead to superior attitudes and purchase intent (Severn, Belch, and Belch 1990).

Similar mixed results are observed in studies of sexual appeals among various consumer segments. While the bulk of sexual appeals are targeted toward adolescents and young adults, recent research suggests that this audience frequently

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Sanjay Putrevu (Ph.D., University at Buffalo, State University of New York) is an associate professor and chair of marketing, University at Albany, State University of New York.

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challenges such portrayals, ad content, and product claims (Rouner, Slater, and Domenech-Rodriguez 2003). Some researchers report that women hold more favorable attitudes and corporate image when exposed to sexual appeals for a cause (Pope, Voges, and Brown 2004), while others report that men are more likely to respond favorably to sexual appeals in general (LaTour and Henthorne 1993). Researchers have argued that sexual appeals increase motivation to process the ad execution elements at the expense of message arguments (MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski 1991; Severn, Belch, and Belch 1990). In line with this reasoning, Reichert, Heckler, and Jackson (2001) report more positive ad execution thoughts and less argument elaboration for sexual appeals. They did not measure involvement or assess the depth and style of processing, however.

Given these mixed results and unanswered questions, it would be useful to isolate the specific factors that could influence the effectiveness of sexual and nonsexual appeals. Three variables that could influence consumer ad processing are involvement, NFC, and gender. Hence, this research examines the impact of these variables on sexual and nonsexual appeals: The first study looks at the effects of involvement, the second study examines the influence of NFC, the third study explores gender differences, and, finally, the follow-up study clarifies that the results observed in the third study are not driven by involvement differences.

## STUDY 1: INVOLVEMENT

Involvement is generally viewed as perceived personal relevance with the target concept (Celsi and Olson 1988; Zaichowsky 1985). For example, Zaichowsky defines involvement as “a person’s perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests” (1985, p. 342) and Celsi and Olson suggest that “a consumer’s level of involvement with an object, situation, or action is determined by the degree to which s/he perceives that concept to be personally relevant” (1988, p. 211). While the measures of involvement vary across studies, most researchers agree that consumer involvement is the major determinant of motivation to process information (MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski 1991; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983). Motivation to process, in turn, is a key determinant of the Elaboration Likelihood Model’s (ELM) routes to persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983). Specifically, high-involvement consumers are likely to follow the central route to persuasion and pay more attention to the message arguments as opposed to less relevant peripheral cues or executional elements. Sexual appeals might be less effective for high-involvement consumers since strong sexual content could compete for attention and reduce focus on key message elements. In contrast, low-involvement consumers are less likely to pay attention to the central message arguments

and less willing to expend the cognitive resources to engage in detailed processing. For such consumers, creative ad executions such as sexual appeals might enhance attention to the ad and engender persuasion through the peripheral route.

*H1: Compared to low-involvement consumers, high-involvement consumers will engage in more in-depth processing of the ads (both sexual and nonsexual appeals), as evidenced by superior recall, more accurate recognition, and higher number of cognitive responses.*

*H2a: Compared to low-involvement consumers, high-involvement consumers will have higher attitude toward the ad ( $A_{ad}$ ), attitude toward the brand ( $A_b$ ), and purchase intent (PI) for nonsexual appeals.*

*H2b: Compared to high-involvement consumers, low-involvement consumers will have higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI for sexual appeals.*

*H3a: Low-involvement consumers will exhibit more in-depth processing of sexual appeals compared to nonsexual appeals, as evidenced by superior recall, more accurate recognition, and higher number of cognitive responses.*

*H3b: Low-involvement consumers will have higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI for sexual appeals compared to nonsexual appeals.*

## Pretests and Manipulation Checks

In a pretest ( $n = 30$ ), college-age participants responded to a single seven-point scale measuring involvement toward several product categories (I would describe my level of involvement with \_\_\_\_\_ as: low/high). Fragrance was selected as the test product category because it exhibited high variance in involvement levels among both sexes and also served as a good exemplar for sexual appeals. In the debriefing session, most respondents described the involvement measure in terms of “low or high personal relevance.”

A common trade-off in most experiments is between realism/generalizability and experimental control. To enhance external validity, the stimuli were actual full-page, color, print ads drawn from national magazines. Several potential fragrance ads were pretested using a second independent sample ( $n = 42$ ) and the two target ads were selected based on their relevance to the college-age population and the extent to which they mirrored the intended manipulation. Both target fragrance ads contained young couples: In the sexual version (Red Delicious by DKNY), the visual (clothing, posture, etc.) and verbal details were sexual, whereas in the nonsexual version (Promesse by Cacharel), the details were romantic. To maintain consistency and reduce potential confounds, the balance between verbal and visual content was similar across the sexual and nonsexual ads. Respondents rated the two fragrance ads on a seven-point scale (I would describe the ad

as: not very sexual/very sexual) and the results confirmed that the sexual appeal manipulation was successful (means of 6.21 and 3.43 for the sexual and nonsexual appeals, respectively;  $t = 7.91, p < .05$ ). Respondents were also asked to write the words that best described the ads. The sexual ad was commonly described using words such as "arousing," "sensual," "sexual," "erotic," and "suggestive," whereas the nonsexual ad was described using words such as "romantic," "love," "happiness," and "commitment."

### Procedure and Measures

The stimulus material, which was positioned as a college magazine, was composed of a 10-page excerpt containing a cover/instruction page, the two target ads, three filler ads, and four filler articles. The target ads (one sexual and one nonsexual) appeared on the fourth and eighth pages and were rotated to reduce order bias. The order was as follows: cover page, filler ad, filler article, target ad, filler article, filler ad, filler article, target ad, filler article, filler ad.

Undergraduate students from multiple disciplines and various years of study participated in Study 1 ( $n = 103$ ; 46 males and 57 females). Respondents were given a small box of premium chocolates as a token of appreciation for their participation. Multiple sessions with approximately 15 respondents per session ensured dispersed seating and reduced the risk of participant interaction during the experiment. Respondents were told that they would be exposed to a new college magazine containing a few ads and feature articles about products and issues of relevance to college-age consumers. They were asked to view the material at their normal pace. To keep the exposure scenario realistic and allow the smooth progress of the experimental sessions, respondents were allowed a maximum of eight minutes to view the folder. At the end of the time, the stimulus excerpt was retrieved and the questionnaire was administered.

Participants were first asked to list all the brands and topics that they could recall from the folder (unaided recall). Following this task, respondents' involvement with each of the product categories and issues listed in the excerpt were assessed on a single seven-point scale described earlier. Respondents were then given the name of the first target brand as the probe cue and asked to list the thoughts that occurred to them as they recalled the message. Next, participants were asked to undertake a recognition task by choosing the correct features of the brand from a list of correct and foil items. After completion of the recognition task, participants responded to measures of prior brand familiarity,  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and  $PI$ . The same procedure was repeated for the second target brand. The experimental sessions lasted approximately 30 minutes and there were no obvious difficulties with any of the questions. At the end of each session, participants were debriefed and

dismissed. There was no evidence of hypothesis guessing or respondent fatigue.

The number of ads/topics recalled was scored from 0 to 9. Unaided recall of the target ad was scored as 1 if the brand was recalled and 0 if it was not. Two experienced judges (one male and one female) who were unfamiliar with the purpose of the study classified the cognitive responses into ad execution, brand, and other thoughts. Interjudge agreement rates were acceptable (.88 to .93), and all disagreements were resolved through discussion. Total thoughts were computed as the sum of ad execution, brand, and other thoughts. Recognition was assessed using signal detection scores calculated as  $A' = .5 + [(y - x)(1 + y - x)]/[4y(1 - x)]$ , where  $x$  is the probability of a false alarm (incorrect acceptance of a foil claim), and  $y$  is the probability of a hit (correct acceptance of a true claim) (Grier 1971). These scores measure discrimination ability uncontaminated by the response tendency of participants and they are the recommended measures of ad recognition (Singh and Churchill 1986).

For each target ad, prior brand familiarity was measured on a single seven-point scale (low/high).  $A_{ad}$  was measured using four sets of seven-point bipolar adjectives: not believable/believable, not true/true, not sincere/sincere, and dishonest/honest;  $A_b$  was measured using four sets of seven-point bipolar adjectives: dislike/like, bad/good, unfavorable/favorable, and useless/useful; and  $PI$  was measured using three sets of seven-point bipolar adjectives: likely/unlikely, improbable/probable, and impossible/possible. The scales for  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and  $PI$  exhibited high reliability ( $\alpha$  values of .88, .90, and .94, respectively).

### Results

The sample was divided into high and low groups based on a median split on involvement with fragrance; the two group means differed significantly from each other (3.47 and 4.72 for low and high involvement, respectively;  $t = 3.33, p < .05$ ). Hypotheses 1 and 2 were assessed using MANCOVA (multivariate analysis of covariance) with brand familiarity scores as covariates. The covariates were not significant. The relevant results are summarized in Table 1. Hypothesis 1 predicts that high-involvement consumers will have superior recall, more accurate recognition, and more cognitive responses than their low-involvement counterparts. All of these expectations are confirmed. Specifically, in comparison with the low-involvement group, the high-involvement group exhibited significantly higher recall of the folder contents (6.39 versus 5.21,  $F = 21.84, p < .01$ ) and target ads (.80 versus .54 for the sexual appeal and .71 versus .40 for the nonsexual appeal, respectively;  $F$  values  $> 8.71, p < .01$ ), as well as superior discrimination ability (.82 versus .71 for the sexual appeal and .73 versus .65 for the nonsexual appeal, respectively;  $F$  values

**TABLE I**  
**Study I: MANCOVA Univariate Tests**

	Low involvement		High involvement		<i>F</i> (1, 100)	<i>p</i> value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
<i>No. of total items recalled</i>	5.21	1.27	6.39	1.28	21.84	<.01
<i>Sexual appeal</i>						
Recall	.54	.50	.80	.40	8.71	<.01
Recognition ( <i>SD</i> scores)	.71	.10	.82	.09	33.14	<.01
Ad execution thoughts	.98	.46	1.29	.46	11.93	<.01
Brand thoughts	1.00	.66	1.39	.49	11.67	<.01
Other thoughts	.29	.46	.41	.50	1.65	<.21
Total thoughts	2.27	1.14	3.10	1.04	14.62	<.01
<i>A</i> <sub>ad</sub>	5.38	.77	4.16	.74	67.98	<.01
<i>A</i> <sub>b</sub>	5.47	.80	3.97	.70	102.58	<.01
<i>PI</i>	5.30	.87	4.12	.89	45.64	<.01
<i>Nonsexual appeal</i>						
Recall	.40	.50	.71	.46	11.26	<.01
Recognition ( <i>SD</i> scores)	.65	.09	.73	.09	21.12	<.01
Ad execution thoughts	.50	.51	.90	.70	11.10	<.01
Brand thoughts	.69	.47	1.31	.65	30.95	<.01
Other thoughts	.21	.41	.22	.42	.02	<.97
Total thoughts	1.40	.96	2.43	1.38	19.35	<.01
<i>A</i> <sub>ad</sub>	4.13	1.06	5.77	.69	84.85	<.01
<i>A</i> <sub>b</sub>	4.18	1.04	5.44	.67	53.50	<.01
<i>PI</i>	3.85	.96	5.29	.69	74.39	<.01

*Notes:* MANCOVA = multivariate analysis of covariance; *A*<sub>ad</sub> = attitude toward the ad; *A*<sub>b</sub> = attitude toward the brand; *PI* = purchase intention.

Multivariate tests for involvement: Pillai's Trace = .92, *F* = 53.66, *p* < .01; Wilks's  $\lambda$  = .08, *F* = 53.66, *p* < .01; Hotelling's Trace = 10.86, *F* = 53.66, *p* < .01; Roy's Largest Root = 10.86, *F* = 53.66, *p* < .01.

> 21.12, *p* < .01). The high-involvement group generated significantly more cognitive responses than the low-involvement group (sexual appeal: 3.10 versus 2.27, *F* = 14.62, *p* < .01; nonsexual appeal: 2.43 versus 1.40, *F* = 19.35, *p* < .01). The difference emerged due to higher values in both ad execution and brand thoughts (*F* values > 11.10, *p* < .01). These results suggest that those who are high in involvement engage in deeper processing of both sexual and nonsexual ads.

High-involvement respondents had higher *A*<sub>ad</sub>, *A*<sub>b</sub>, and *PI* for nonsexual appeals compared to their low-involvement counterparts (*F* values > 53.50, *p* < .01). In contrast, low-involvement respondents had higher *A*<sub>ad</sub>, *A*<sub>b</sub>, and *PI* for sexual appeals compared to those with high involvement (*F* values > 45.64, *p* < .01). Hence, both H2a and H2b are supported. There were no gender differences.

Hypothesis 3 was assessed using pair-wise *t* tests among low-involvement respondents and the relevant contrasts are discussed below (the means are listed in Table 1). In line with H3a, a higher proportion of low-involvement respondents recalled the sexual appeal (.54 versus .40 for the sexual and the nonsexual appeal, respectively; *t* = 2.44, *p* < .05); the low-involvement group also showed superior discrimination ability (recognition) for the sexual appeal (.71 versus .65,

*t* = 5.39, *p* < .01). In addition, low-involvement consumers generated more cognitive responses for sexual appeals than nonsexual appeals (2.27 versus 1.40, *t* = 11.12, *p* < .01) and this difference emerged due to increases in both ad execution and brand thoughts (.98 versus .50 and 1.00 versus .69, respectively; *t* values > 4.76, *p* < .01). As predicted by H3b, low-involvement consumers showed more of an affinity toward sexual appeals than nonsexual appeals, as evidenced by higher scores on *A*<sub>ad</sub> (5.38 versus 4.13, *t* = 11.46, *p* < .01), *A*<sub>b</sub> (5.47 versus 4.18, *t* = 10.47, *p* < .01), and *PI* (5.30 versus 3.85, *t* = 13.63, *p* < .01) for the sexual appeal versus the nonsexual appeal. Though not specifically hypothesized, a similar analysis was undertaken for high-involvement respondents. While there were no significant differences in recall, the high-involvement group generated more ad execution thoughts (1.29 versus .90, *t* = 5.68, *p* < .01) and total thoughts (3.10 versus 2.43, *t* = 4.23, *p* < .01) and showed better discrimination ability (.82 versus .73, *t* = 6.62, *p* < .01) for the sexual appeal versus the nonsexual appeal. However, the sexual appeal elicited lower *A*<sub>ad</sub> (4.16 versus 5.77, *t* = 11.71, *p* < .01), *A*<sub>b</sub> (3.97 versus 5.44, *t* = 13.80, *p* < .01), and *PI* (4.12 versus 5.29, *t* = 8.09, *p* < .01) for high-involvement respondents. The cognitive response data were reexamined to understand



why deeper processing led to lower affect and purchase intent. The data show that high-involvement respondents generated more negative ad execution and brand thoughts toward the sexual appeals than the nonsexual appeals. These consumers also seem to find the sexual content to be distracting. These results suggest that sexual appeals might be effective when targeting low-involvement consumers, but that they might not work well for high-involvement consumers.

## STUDY 2: NEED FOR COGNITION (NFC)

Cacioppo and Petty define NFC as the “tendency for an individual to engage in and enjoy thinking” (1982, p. 116). NFC could moderate the effectiveness of an ad through its influence on the preferred style and amount of processing. In the advertising context, NFC has been shown to influence the degree of attention to arguments and cues, image generation, and consumer responses to humor, message framing, and ad complexity (cf. Lord and Putrevu 2006). For example, high-NFC consumers are more likely to follow the ELM’s central route to persuasion by forming attitudes on the basis of in-depth processing and careful evaluation of message claims (Haugtvedt, Petty, and Cacioppo 1992). Also, consumers high in NFC enjoy mentally stimulating ads and are more receptive to complex messages (Putrevu, Tan, and Lord 2004). Such consumers have better-developed cognitive structures to interpret the visual and verbal cues imbedded in ads, conduct more vivid elaboration, and experience higher levels of image generation (Childers, Heckler, and Houston 1986). In contrast, low-NFC consumers often fail to follow the logic and meaning of complex messages and miss vital arguments (Frey and Eagly 1993). In addition, low-NFC consumers are more likely to suffer from information overload than those who are high in NFC (Malhotra 1982). These arguments suggest that high-NFC consumers are intrinsically motivated and able to undertake effortful processing of messages, whereas that is not the case for low-NFC consumers. Hence, sexual appeals might be necessary to engage the attention of low-NFC consumers. In contrast, high-NFC consumers might not welcome such appeals, as they could detract from key message arguments.

*H4: Compared to low-NFC consumers, high-NFC consumers will engage in more in-depth processing of the ads (for both sexual and nonsexual appeals), as evidenced by superior recall, more accurate recognition, and higher number of cognitive responses.*

*H5a: Compared to low-NFC consumers, high-NFC consumers will have higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI for nonsexual appeals.*

*H5b: Compared to high-NFC consumers, low-NFC consumers will have higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI for sexual appeals.*

*H6a: Low-NFC consumers will exhibit more in-depth processing of sexual appeals than nonsexual appeals, as evidenced*

*by superior recall, more accurate recognition, and higher number of cognitive responses.*

*H6b: Low-NFC consumers will have higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI for sexual appeals than nonsexual appeals.*

## Pretests and Manipulation Checks

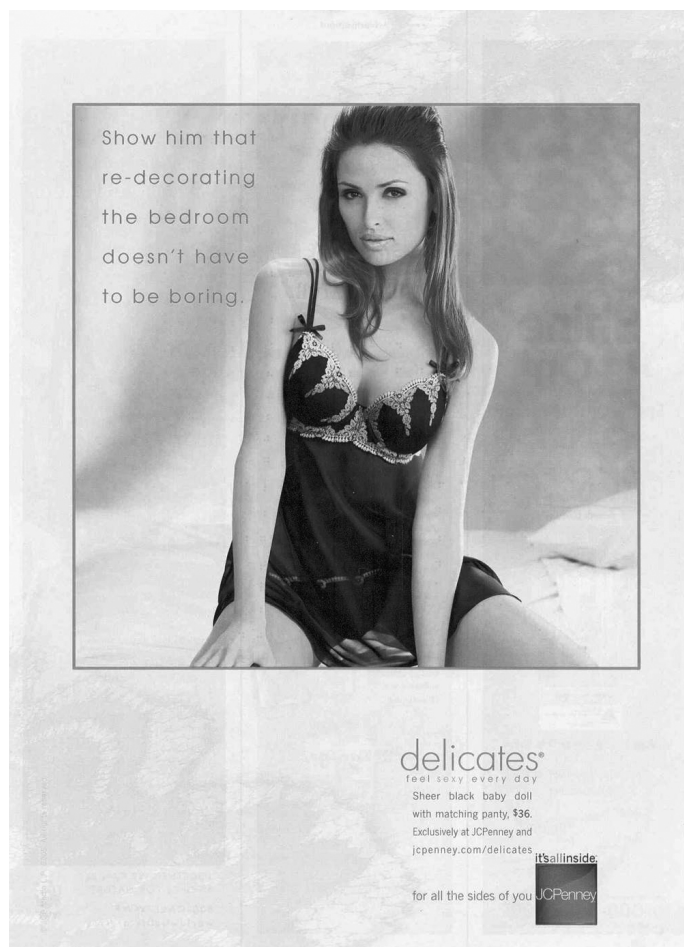
To enhance external validity, the stimuli were actual full-page, color, print ads drawn from national magazines. Several potential retail store ads were pretested on an independent sample ( $n = 42$ ) and the two target ads were selected based on their relevance to the college-age population and the extent to which they mirrored the intended manipulation. In the J.C. Penney ad (sexual version), a young female model was shown wearing lingerie along with sexually suggestive verbal content (Figure 1); in the Burlington Coat Factory ad (nonsexual version), a young female model was shown wearing regular clothing with more fashion-oriented verbal content (Figure 2). To avoid potential confounds, the balance between verbal and visual content was somewhat similar across the sexual and nonsexual ads. Respondents rated the two target ads on a seven-point scale (I would describe the ad as: not very sexual/very sexual). The sexual appeal manipulation was successful (means of 5.99 and 3.34 for the sexual and nonsexual appeals, respectively;  $t = 6.75$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Furthermore, the respondents commonly described the sexual ad using words such as “arousing,” “sexy,” “hot,” “erotic,” and “suggestive,” and the nonsexual ad using words such as “fashionable,” “chic,” “cute,” and “modern.”

## Procedure, Measures, and Results

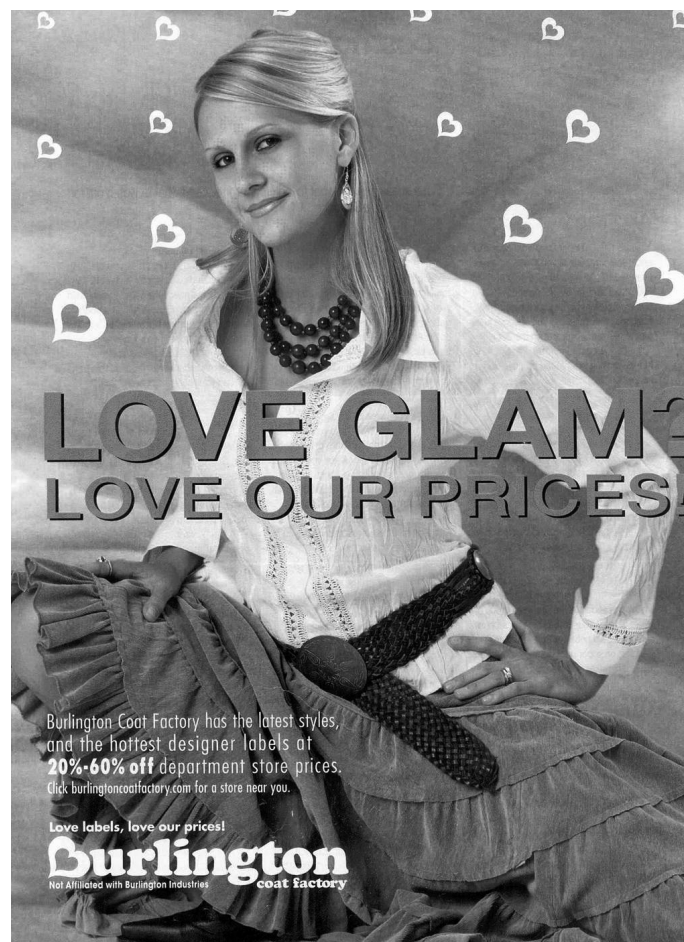
Undergraduate students ( $n = 99$ ; 44 males and 55 females) from various disciplines participated in the second study. With the exception of measuring NFC in place of involvement, the general procedure and measures were identical to those in Study 1. The scales for  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and  $PI$  exhibited high reliability ( $\alpha$  values of .90, .86, and .93, respectively). The participants responded to Cacioppo, Petty, and Kao’s (1984) abbreviated 18-item NFC scale ( $\alpha = .88$ ). The sample was divided into high and low groups based on a median split on the NFC scores; the two group means differed significantly from each other (3.16 and 4.82 for low and high NFC, respectively;  $t = 4.77$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Hypotheses 4 and 5 were assessed using MANCOVA with brand familiarity scores as covariates. The covariates were not significant. The relevant results are summarized in Table 2. Hypothesis 4 predicts that high-NFC respondents would have superior recall, more accurate recognition, and more cognitive responses than their low-NFC counterparts. All of these expectations are confirmed. Specifically, in comparison with the low-NFC group, those high in NFC exhibited significantly

**FIGURE 1**  
Sexual Appeal  
(Retail Store—JC Penney)



**FIGURE 2**  
Nonsexual Appeal  
(Retail Store—Burlington Coat Factory)



higher recall of the folder contents (6.27 versus 5.12,  $F = 16.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ), recall of target ads (.78 versus .58 for sexual appeal and .69 versus .46 for nonsexual appeal, respectively;  $F$  values  $> 4.41$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and superior discrimination ability (.83 versus .72 for sexual appeal and .73 versus .65 for nonsexual appeal, respectively;  $F$  values  $> 20.17$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The high-NFC group generated significantly more cognitive responses than the low-NFC group (sexual appeal: 3.25 versus 2.42,  $F = 14.55$ ,  $p < .01$ ; nonsexual appeal: 2.37 versus 1.48,  $F = 14.49$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The difference emerged due to higher values in both ad execution and brand thoughts ( $F$  values  $> 5.77$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Taken together, these results suggest that high-NFC consumers engage in deeper processing of both sexual and nonsexual ads.

High-NFC respondents had higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and  $PI$  for nonsexual appeals than their low-NFC counterparts ( $F$  values  $> 44.62$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In contrast, low-NFC respondents had higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and  $PI$  for sexual appeals than those who were high in NFC ( $F$  values  $> 34.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Hence, both H5a and H5b are supported. There were no gender differences.

Hypothesis 6 was assessed using pair-wise  $t$  tests among low-NFC respondents and the relevant contrasts are discussed below (the means are listed in Table 2). In line with H6a, a higher proportion of low-NFC respondents recalled the sexual appeal, although this difference was only marginally significant (.58 versus .46 for the sexual and nonsexual appeal, respectively;  $t = 1.63$ ,  $p < .10$ ). The low-NFC group showed superior discrimination ability (recognition) for the sexual appeal (.72 versus .65,  $t = 4.56$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Also, low-NFC consumers generated more cognitive responses for sexual appeals than nonsexual appeals (2.42 versus 1.48,  $t = 6.80$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the difference emerged due to increases in both ad execution and brand thoughts (1.10 versus .52 and 1.04 versus .76, respectively;  $t$  values  $> 3.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As predicted by H6b, low-NFC consumers showed more affinity toward sexual appeals than nonsexual appeals, as evidenced by higher scores on  $A_{ad}$  (5.31 versus 4.25,  $t = 8.94$ ,  $p < .01$ ),  $A_b$  (5.40 versus 4.26,  $t = 7.91$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and  $PI$  (5.21 versus 3.96,  $t = 10.95$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Though not specifically hypothesized, a

**TABLE 2**  
**Study 2: MANCOVA Univariate Tests**

	Low NFC		High NFC		F(1, 96)	p value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
No. of total items recalled	5.12	1.32	6.27	1.46	16.64	<.01
<i>Sexual appeal</i>						
Recall	.58	.50	.78	.42	4.41	<.04
Recognition (SD scores)	.72	.12	.83	.11	23.72	<.01
Ad execution thoughts	1.10	.58	1.39	.61	5.77	<.02
Brand thoughts	1.04	.61	1.45	.50	13.47	<.01
Other thoughts	.28	.45	.41	.50	1.88	<.18
Total thoughts	2.42	1.07	3.25	1.07	14.55	<.01
A <sub>ad</sub>	5.31	.77	4.23	.73	51.34	<.01
A <sub>b</sub>	5.40	.83	4.14	.66	69.13	<.01
PI	5.21	.86	4.19	.86	34.64	<.01
<i>Nonsexual appeal</i>						
Recall	.46	.50	.69	.47	5.70	<.02
Recognition (SD scores)	.65	.09	.73	.09	20.17	<.01
Ad execution thoughts	.52	.51	.92	.70	10.41	<.01
Brand thoughts	.76	.52	1.29	.65	19.98	<.01
Other thoughts	.20	.40	.16	.37	.18	<.68
Total thoughts	1.48	.97	2.37	1.35	14.49	<.01
A <sub>ad</sub>	4.25	.99	5.71	.77	66.52	<.01
A <sub>b</sub>	4.26	1.02	5.41	.69	44.62	<.01
PI	3.96	.95	5.23	.79	51.44	<.01

Notes: MANCOVA = multivariate analysis of covariance; NFC = need for cognition; A<sub>ad</sub> = attitude toward the ad; A<sub>b</sub> = attitude toward the brand; PI = purchase intention. Multivariate tests for NFC: Pillai's Trace = .86,  $F = 29.00$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Wilks's  $\lambda = .14$ ,  $F = 29.00$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Hotelling's Trace = 6.16,  $F = 29.00$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Roy's Largest Root = 6.16,  $F = 29.00$ ,  $p < .01$ .

similar analysis was undertaken for high-NFC respondents. While there were no significant differences in recall, high-NFC consumers had more cognitive responses (3.25 versus 2.37,  $t = 5.44$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and better discrimination ability (.83 versus .73,  $t = 6.86$ ,  $p < .01$ ) for the sexual appeal. The higher levels of cognitive responses were driven by higher levels of ad execution thoughts. This greater focus on ad execution issues seems to translate into lower A<sub>ad</sub> (4.23 versus 5.71,  $t = 9.69$ ,  $p < .01$ ), A<sub>b</sub> (4.14 versus 5.41,  $t = 10.93$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and PI (4.19 versus 5.23,  $t = 6.73$ ,  $p < .01$ ) toward sexual appeals. The cognitive response data were reexamined to better understand this phenomenon. The data show that high-NFC respondents generated more negative ad execution thoughts toward sexual appeals and found the sexual content to be irritating and distracting. These results suggest that sexual appeals are useful for low-NFC consumers, but that they might not be effective for high-NFC consumers.

### STUDY 3: GENDER

There were no gender differences in Studies 1 and 2. Although gender differences were not specifically hypothesized, it is useful to comment on their absence. In contrast to findings from

some prior research (Fetto 2001; LaTour and Henthorne 1993), the results of Studies 1 and 2 suggest that women do not have a general unfavorable predisposition toward sexual appeals. Also, gender differences might not have emerged because the sexual ad type was not manipulated. The third study addresses this issue, that is, the sexual ad type was manipulated to reflect a weak versus strong fit with the target brand. Fit is defined as the appropriateness of the ad execution for the product/brand (e.g., relevance of the sexual appeal to the target brand, sexuality/product congruence).

The selectivity hypothesis suggests that except under high-involvement conditions, gender differences in ad response emerge because men are more likely to be driven by overall message themes or schemas and women are more likely to engage in detailed elaboration of message content (Meyers-Levy 1989; Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran 1991; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991). Specifically, men, as selective processors, base their judgment on a select subset of all available information, whereas women, as comprehensive processors, attempt to assimilate all available information before rendering judgment. Hence, the selectivity hypothesis predicts that under low/moderate levels of involvement, women will process ad messages more thoroughly than men.



While the selectivity classification predicts gender differences in depth of processing, an alternative classification scheme predicts gender differences in style of processing. Researchers in the area of cognitive psychology report that comprehension can occur through two types of elaboration: relational processing and item-specific processing (Einstein and Hunt 1980; Hunt and Einstein 1981). Relational processing emphasizes similarities or shared themes among disparate pieces of information and might occur spontaneously when people receive many similar message cues. On the other hand, item-specific processing focuses on attributes that are unique or distinctive to the target brand or message. Such processing might occur spontaneously when people receive multiple message cues that are largely unrelated to each other. While situational factors can influence the processing style, gender-based differences in processing styles have been reported in recent research (Putrevu 2004). Driven by self-focused agentic goals, men are likely to focus on those message elements and attributes that are of immediate relevance to them (item-specific processing). In contrast, driven by relationship-oriented communal goals, women are more likely to consider all aspects of the message since they are interested in interrelationships between various message elements and attributes (relational processing).

Relational processors (women) are more concerned with how everything in the message fits together and they might object to ad execution styles that do not fit with the target brand. Hence, women are more likely to direct increased attention to message execution when there is a weak fit as opposed to when the fit is strong. Women are also likely to engage in deeper processing of the message and respond more favorably when there is a strong fit as opposed to a weak fit. Since item-specific processors (men) are more concerned about particular unique attributes, they are less likely to object to a lack of overall fit between the advertised brand and the ad execution style. Hence, such processing differences are unlikely to emerge for men.

*H7a: Compared to men, women will engage in more in-depth processing of sexual appeals with a strong fit.*

*H7b: Compared to men, women will generate more ad execution thoughts toward sexual appeals with a weak fit.*

*H7c: Compared to men, women will have higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI for sexual appeals with a strong fit.*

*H7d: Compared to women, men will have higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI for sexual appeals with a weak fit.*

*H8a: Women will engage in more in-depth processing of sexual appeals with a strong fit than those with a weak fit.*

*H8b: Women will have higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI for sexual appeals with a strong fit than those with a weak fit.*

*H8c: Men will engage in the same depth of processing for both sexual appeals, irrespective of the fit between the target ad and the sexual content.*

*H8d: Men will have the same levels of  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI for both sexual appeals, irrespective of the fit between the target ad and the sexual content.*

## Pretests and Manipulation Checks

As before, the stimuli were actual full-page, color, print ads drawn from national magazines. Both target ads were for shoes. They contained young couples, and the visual and verbal details in both ads were sexual. However, in the sexual weak-fit version (Unlimited), the visual contents were sexual without a strong connection to shoes, whereas in the sexual strong-fit version (Skechers), the shoes were prominently featured, the visual contained additional brand exemplars, and the depiction was athletic. In the pretest described earlier ( $n = 42$ ), participants rated the sexual nature and fit of two target ads on single seven-point scales (I would describe the ad as: not very sexual/very sexual; I feel the overall match/fit between the product and the ad is: weak/strong). The results confirmed that both appeals were considered sexual (means of 6.01 and 5.78 for Unlimited and Skechers, respectively;  $t = 1.04$ ,  $p > .10$ ) and that the fit level was perceived as intended (means of 2.88 and 4.70 for weak and strong fit, respectively;  $t = 3.91$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The respondents described both the ads using words such as "arousing," "sexy," "hot," and "suggestive." The ad for Skechers (strong fit) also elicited responses related to sports and exercise, and none of the respondents questioned its relevance to shoes, whereas the ad for Unlimited (weak fit) elicited responses related to sex and indecency, and many questioned its relevance to shoes.

## Procedure, Measures, and Results

One hundred thirty-two undergraduate students (66 males and 66 females) participated in the third study. The same general procedure outlined earlier was followed, with one major difference in the stimuli: both target shoe ads were sexual appeals, one with a strong fit and the other with a weak fit. The instructions and measures were identical to the earlier studies except that involvement and NFC were not measured. The scales for  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI exhibited high reliability ( $\alpha$  values of .91, .90, and .92, respectively).

Hypothesis 7 was assessed using MANCOVA, with brand familiarity scores as covariates. Although the covariates were significant, their inclusion or exclusion did not substantively alter the results. The results are shown in Table 3. Hypothesis 7a predicts that compared to men, women would engage in more in-depth processing of sexual appeals with a strong fit.



**TABLE 3**  
**Study 3: MANCOVA Univariate Tests**

	Male		Female		<i>F</i> (1, 128)	<i>p</i> value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
<i>No. of total items recalled</i>	5.61	1.64	5.89	1.88	1.45	<.24
<i>Weak-fit sexual appeal</i>						
Recall	.55	.50	.61	.49	.90	<.35
Recognition (SD scores)	.71	.11	.73	.14	2.40	<.13
Ad execution thoughts	1.05	.67	1.38	.49	9.70	<.01
Brand thoughts	.99	.78	.89	.66	.41	<.53
Other thoughts	.26	.44	.32	.47	1.08	<.31
Total thoughts	2.29	1.27	2.61	.89	3.06	<.09
<i>A<sub>ad</sub></i>	5.14	.94	4.39	1.01	19.54	<.01
<i>A<sub>b</sub></i>	5.24	.92	4.31	.97	33.52	<.01
<i>PI</i>	5.08	.97	4.38	1.11	17.30	<.01
<i>Strong-fit sexual appeal</i>						
Recall	.49	.50	.76	.43	14.53	<.01
Recognition (SD scores)	.70	.13	.80	.12	25.39	<.01
Ad execution thoughts	.86	.70	.91	.70	.48	<.49
Brand thoughts	1.09	.74	1.42	.70	10.44	<.01
Other thoughts	.30	.46	.24	.43	.09	<.78
Total thoughts	2.26	1.23	2.58	1.35	4.49	<.04
<i>A<sub>ad</sub></i>	5.09	.97	5.75	.69	13.35	<.01
<i>A<sub>b</sub></i>	5.12	1.42	5.62	.79	7.31	<.01
<i>PI</i>	4.93	1.41	5.53	.77	7.75	<.01

Notes: MANCOVA = multivariate analysis of covariance; *A<sub>ad</sub>* = attitude toward the ad; *A<sub>b</sub>* = attitude toward the brand; *PI* = purchase intention.

Multivariate tests for gender: Pillai's Trace = .52, *F* = 6.56, *p* < .01; Wilks's  $\lambda$  = .49, *F* = 6.56, *p* < .01; Hotelling's Trace = 1.06, *F* = 6.56, *p* < .01; Roy's Largest Root = 1.06, *F* = 6.56, *p* < .01.

This prediction is supported: Compared to men, a higher proportion of women recalled the target ad (.76 versus .49, *F* = 14.53, *p* < .01), and women had higher discrimination ability (.80 versus .70, *F* = 25.39, *p* < .01) and total thoughts (2.58 versus 2.26, *F* = 4.49, *p* < .05). As predicted by H7b, women generated more ad execution thoughts than men when there was a weak fit (1.38 versus 1.05, *F* = 9.70, *p* < .01). Compared to their male counterparts, women had higher *A<sub>ad</sub>*, *A<sub>b</sub>*, and *PI* for sexual appeals with a strong fit (*F* values > 7.31, *p* < .01). In contrast, compared to women, men had higher *A<sub>ad</sub>*, *A<sub>b</sub>*, and *PI* for sexual appeals with a weak fit (*F* values > 17.30, *p* < .01). Hence, both H7c and H7d are supported. In sum, women were more likely to respond favorably to sexual appeals when there was a strong fit between the sexual appeal and the target brand.

Hypothesis 8 was assessed using pair-wise *t* tests among women and men, respectively. According to H8a, women were expected to engage in more detailed processing of ads with a strong fit. This prediction is partially borne out by the data: There were significant differences in recall (.76 versus .61 for the strong- and weak-fit appeals, respectively; *t* = 2.19, *p* < .05) and discrimination ability (.80 versus .73, *t* = 3.21, *p* < .01), but not total thoughts (2.58 versus 2.61, *t* = .19,

*p* > .10). As predicted by H8b, women had superior *A<sub>ad</sub>* (5.75 versus 4.39, *t* = 9.06, *p* < .01), *A<sub>b</sub>* (5.62 versus 4.31, *t* = 9.83, *p* < .01) and *PI* (5.53 versus 4.38, *t* = 7.86, *p* < .01) for appeals with a strong fit. While the total thoughts generated by women did not differ across the two types of sexual appeals, the processing focus was different. Women generated significantly more ad execution thoughts when there was a weak fit and more brand thoughts when there was a strong fit (.91 versus 1.38 and 1.42 versus .89, respectively; *t* values > 3.21, *p* < .01 [see Table 3]). Furthermore, the cognitive responses of women were more negative toward sexual appeals with a weak fit. This change of processing focus seems to have translated into superior affect and purchase intent for appeals with a strong fit and inferior affect and purchase intent for appeals with a weak fit. Among men, there were no differences in any of the response variables across the strong- and weak-fit conditions (*t* values < 1.41, *p* > .10). Hence, as predicted by H8c and H8d, men did not exhibit any differences in depth of processing, affect, or purchase intent for the two types of sexual appeals.

These results suggest that the fit between the sexual appeal and product category might be important for a female audience, but that such a fit is less relevant for males. The findings

also suggest that women do not object to sexual appeals, as long there is a reasonable connection between the appeal and the target brand. Female distaste for sexual appeals seems to emerge when the appeals seem irrelevant in the ad context. Perhaps these findings explain the preponderance of sexual appeals targeting younger consumers: Young men welcome them, while young women do not object to them unless the fit is nonexistent.

### FOLLOW-UP STUDY

Since involvement was not measured in Study 3, it is difficult to rule out the alternative explanation that the observed results were driven by involvement rather than gender. In addition, the use of single-item scales to measure involvement, familiarity, sexual appeal, and fit is less than ideal. To address these issues, a follow-up study was undertaken with an independent sample of undergraduate students ( $n = 45$ ; 24 males and 21 females). Since the confound issue is limited to Study 3, only those two target shoe ads were used as stimuli. Participants saw the target ads (one at a time) and then answered a battery of questions.

Participants responded to the 20-item personal involvement inventory (PII) scale (Zaichkowsky 1985), as well as the single-item involvement measure used earlier. The PII scale had high reliability ( $\alpha$  values of .97 and .98 for the two target ads, respectively) and was highly correlated with the single-item involvement measure (.89 and .90 for the two target ads, respectively;  $p < .01$ ). The following constructs were measured on seven-point scales (strongly disagree/strongly agree) for each target ad. Prior brand familiarity was assessed using three items (familiarity, awareness, prior knowledge), as well as the single-item measure described earlier. The three-item scale was reliable ( $\alpha$  values of .82 and .81) and highly correlated with the single-item measure (.79 and .82,  $p < .01$ ). Sexual appeal was measured using six items (erotic, sensual, suggestive, passionate, arousing, and indecent), as well as the single-item measure used earlier. The six-item scale had high reliability ( $\alpha$  values of .86 and .91) and was highly correlated with the single-item measure (.84 and .86,  $p < .01$ ). The fit level was measured using four items (ad is appropriate for the product; ad highlights product features; ad depicts the product in the right context; ad is a good match with the product depicted), as well as the single-item measure used earlier. The four-item scale had high reliability ( $\alpha$  values of .95 and .88) and was highly correlated with the single-item measure (.80 and .85,  $p < .01$ ).  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and  $PI$  scales were the same as in earlier studies and they exhibited high reliability ( $\alpha$  values of .89, .91, and .91, respectively).

Both the target ads were deemed sexual (means of 5.75 and 5.54 for Unlimited and Skechers, respectively;  $t = .91$ ,  $p > .10$ ). There was a significant difference in the perceived fit

level between the two ads: The Unlimited brand was a weak fit and the Skechers brand was a strong fit (3.15 and 5.17, respectively;  $t = 4.92$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 7 was assessed using MANCOVA with brand familiarity and PII scores as covariates (see Table 4). None of the covariates was significant. Consistent with H7a, women generated more total thoughts than men for sexual appeals with a strong fit (3.24 versus 2.29,  $F = 17.20$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As predicted by H7b, compared to men, women generated more ad execution thoughts when there was a weak fit (1.33 versus .92,  $F = 9.72$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Recall and recognition were not assessed since the participants were only exposed to the target ads. Compared to their male counterparts, women had higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and  $PI$  for sexual appeals with a strong fit ( $F$  values  $> 5.56$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In contrast, compared to women, men had higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and  $PI$  for sexual appeals with a weak fit ( $F$  values  $> 12.89$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Hence, H7c and H7d are supported.

Hypothesis 8 was assessed using pair-wise  $t$  tests among women and men, respectively. Hypothesis 8a was supported, as women generated more total thoughts for ads with a strong fit than those with a weak fit (3.24 versus 2.52,  $t = 3.63$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As predicted by H8b, women had superior  $A_{ad}$  (5.86 versus 3.99,  $t = 9.63$ ,  $p < .01$ ),  $A_b$  (5.67 versus 3.96,  $t = 9.79$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and  $PI$  (5.43 versus 4.08,  $t = 7.36$ ,  $p < .01$ ) for appeals with a strong fit. In addition to the difference in the number of total thoughts, the processing focus of women was also different in the strong- and weak-fit conditions. Women generated significantly more ad execution thoughts when there was a weak fit and more brand thoughts when there was a strong fit (1.05 versus 1.33 and 1.62 versus .81, respectively;  $t$  values  $> 2.83$ ,  $p < .05$  [see Table 4]). Also, the weak-fit sexual appeal elicited more negative valence thoughts among women. This translated into superior affect and purchase intent for appeals with a strong fit and inferior affect and purchase intent for appeals with a weak fit. Among men, there were no differences in any of the response variables across the strong- and weak-fit conditions ( $t$  values  $< 1.47$ ,  $p > .10$ ). Hence, H8c and H8d are supported. These results parallel those obtained in Study 3, and provide further evidence that the fit between the sexual appeal and target brand is more important for women than for men. Also, gender seems to be driving the observed results, not involvement.

### DISCUSSION

This research set out to examine whether sexual and non-sexual ads elicit different responses based on involvement, NFC, and gender of the respondent. The results suggest that sexual appeals generate higher recall, better recognition, more cognitive responses, and superior attitudes and purchase intent among low-involvement consumers. On the other hand, high-involvement consumers process both sexual and non-

**TABLE 4**  
**Follow-up Study: MANCOVA Univariate Tests**

	Male		Female		F(1, 39)	p value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
<i>Weak-fit sexual appeal</i>						
Ad execution thoughts	.92	.50	1.33	.48	9.72	<.01
Brand thoughts	.88	.68	.81	.68	.13	<.73
Other thoughts	.54	.72	.38	.50	.59	<.45
Total thoughts	2.33	1.05	2.52	.81	.81	<.38
A <sub>ad</sub>	5.18	.64	3.99	.71	30.71	<.01
A <sub>b</sub>	5.20	.66	3.96	.68	30.83	<.01
PI	5.09	.87	4.08	.76	12.89	<.01
<i>Strong-fit sexual appeal</i>						
Ad execution thoughts	.83	.38	1.05	.22	4.99	<.04
Brand thoughts	1.04	.55	1.62	.59	10.34	<.01
Other thoughts	.42	.58	.57	.60	1.28	<.27
Total thoughts	2.29	.75	3.24	.77	17.20	<.01
A <sub>ad</sub>	4.87	1.34	5.86	.60	9.32	<.01
A <sub>b</sub>	4.77	1.54	5.67	.77	6.38	<.02
PI	4.64	1.39	5.42	.72	5.56	<.03

Notes: MANCOVA = multivariate analysis of covariance; A<sub>ad</sub> = attitude toward the ad; A<sub>b</sub> = attitude toward the brand; PI = purchase intention.

Multivariate tests for gender: Pillai's Trace = .82,  $F = 10.30$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Wilks's  $\lambda = .19$ ,  $F = 10.30$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Hotelling's Trace = 4.41,  $F = 10.30$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Roy's Largest Root = 4.41,  $F = 10.30$ ,  $p < .01$ .

sexual ads more thoroughly and exhibit superior attitudes and purchase intent toward nonsexual appeals. A similar pattern emerges for NFC whereby low-NFC consumers favor sexual appeals and high-NFC consumers favor nonsexual appeals. With respect to gender, women are more likely to respond favorably to sexual appeals when there is a strong fit between the ad and brand, but not when the fit is weak. In contrast, men are more likely to respond favorably to sexual appeals irrespective of the level of fit.

This research has the following limitations. The samples were drawn from a population of undergraduate students, which limits the generalizability of the findings. While college-age consumers are frequently targeted using sexual appeals, they are not the only intended audience for such messages. Budget, time, and space constraints resulted in sample sizes that were somewhat modest. Respondent fatigue considerations necessitated the use of single-item scales to measure some constructs. While the results of the follow-up study alleviate this concern to some degree, future research should use multi-item measures. Although ads for different product categories and brands were used across the studies, each study used a single exemplar of each ad type. Also, the artificial ad exposure scenario of the experiment could have influenced the responses, despite attempts to limit ad exposure time. This does not seem to be a major concern, however, since the debriefing sessions revealed no evidence of hypothesis guessing or respondent fatigue. Another concern is the use of real ads.

While such ads enhance external validity, they detract from internal validity by introducing other extraneous elements.

The results provide some general guidelines for advertising strategy. Advertisers are generally concerned about consumer apathy and lack of involvement with their brand messages. Sexual appeals provide a way to grab the attention of the audience. They also seem to engender deeper processing of messages and enhance attitudes and purchase intent when involvement is low. In today's increasingly cluttered and information-rich media environment, consumers, especially those who are low in NFC, selectively process messages to avoid information overload. Sexual appeals provide a way to break through the cognitive defense mechanisms and engage low-NFC consumers. Hence, advertisers could target sexual appeals toward consumers who exhibit low levels of involvement or NFC. For example, in situations where audience involvement or NFC can be tied to a particular media vehicle (e.g., Internet travel Web sites with travel/tourism, magazines like *Newsweek* with current events, television programs like *Jeopardy* with intellectual pursuits), advertisers could devise nonsexual (sexual) appeals to match. Advertisers should focus on the level of fit between the message and the target brand when the audience is predominantly female, since women are likely to respond favorably to sexual appeals with a strong fit and reject such appeals when the fit is weak. Media vehicles whose target audience is predominantly of one gender (e.g., *GQ* versus *Vogue*) are good candidates for gender-specific sexual appeals.



Future research could replicate this research using more representative samples, additional product and brand exemplars, and media types. For example, one could explore whether the acceptance of sexual appeals varies by product category and whether such appeals are more (less) effective in particular media. Future research could examine these variables (involvement, NFC, and gender) together to isolate their interactive effects. Researchers could manipulate (rather than measure) key variables such as involvement. It would also be useful to explore the impact of other contextual, cultural, and individual-difference variables on consumer response toward sexual appeals. Finally, researchers could examine time-lag effects by using day-after or week-after exposure measures.

Despite the ethical and moral issues related to sexual ads, advertising in modern times is replete with examples of such appeals. Advertisers are frequently driven by profit motives and use communication strategies such as sexual appeals to improve the bottom line. This research isolates some conditions that might help or hinder the effectiveness of such appeals. The preponderance of sexual appeals seems to be driven at least partially by their ability to garner consumer attention, engender deeper processing, and enhance affect and purchase intent.

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